



Online learning series: Session 5

Gender-transformative collective action to end child marriage

Key takeaways

- We can only end child marriage¹ if we address the **root causes of gender inequality**, and we will not achieve gender equality unless we address child marriage²: gender-transformative collective action is the way to do this.
- **Approaches that are not gender-transformative** may have little, or even negative impacts on girls' well-being, safety and agency and will not sustainably advance or accelerate progress on child marriage.
- Gender-transformative action (GTA):
 - Means transforming social norms and behaviour change *and* transformative policies, institutions, economic practices and services that centre the equal rights of women and girls in all their diversity.
 - Is needed to **meet the global challenge of accelerating progress** by fifteen to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of zero child marriage by 2030.
 - Requires the **skills, knowledge and leadership** of individuals and organisations. These can be built through a **gender-transformative journey**,³ which requires sustained investment and support.

Definition of gender-transformative collective action:

- Gender-transformative collective action means addressing the root causes of gender inequality:
 - Promoting positive norms
 - Fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms and power dynamics
 - Transforming the underlying social structures, policies and behaviours that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequality
- GTA needs to be context-sensitive and informed by an understanding of intersectionality.⁴ This means recognising the diversity of lived experience and gender identities, and that the risk of child marriage is higher for some individuals than it is for others.

“When you cut a tree from the roots then it will not grow again. When you cut a branch, it will continue.”

¹ In this document, we use the term “child marriage” to refer to all forms of child, early, and forced marriage and unions where at least one party is under the age of 18.

² *Girls Not Brides, 2020, Ending child, early and forced marriage and unions is crucial to gender equality*, <https://bit.ly/3VjppFl>

³ The Civil Society Organisation Facilitation Guide for a gender-transformative journey which is an adaptation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage GTA Accelerator Tool and was piloted in 2022 by *Girls Not Brides* in Mozambique and Nigeria. It will be published in 2023.

⁴ *Girls Not Brides, 2022, An intersectional approach to end child marriage*, <https://bit.ly/3Vp6t8b>

- The six core elements for GTA ⁵ are:
 1. Adolescent girls' skills, agency and leadership
 2. Enabling environment, family and community mobilisation
 3. Addressing masculinities, engaging men and boys
 4. Services and multi-sectoral collaboration
 5. Policies and laws, structural change, institutional partnerships
 6. Addressing gender norms and inequalities, integrating this across all gender-transformative work
- Collective action is at the heart of a rights-based and comprehensive approach to catalysing change at the individual and institutional levels, including:
 - Multi-sectoral collaboration for gender-transformative public services including education, health and social protection.
 - Transformation of discriminatory social norms, gender roles and power dynamics to create alternatives to child marriage, and create the conditions for girls and women to exercise their rights safely and with dignity.

Child marriage and gender equality

- The *Girls Not Brides* commitment goes beyond a world without child marriage to one where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men, and can achieve their full potential.
- Women in Africa experience some of the highest levels of discrimination in the world, including low levels of decision-making power in the family. When families also experience poverty and/or crisis, few girls can choose if, when and whom to marry.⁶
 - 16% of women agree it is acceptable for their spouse to be solely responsible for decisions about money, including money they have earned.
 - Women spend an average of four times more time than men on care responsibilities.
 - While acceptance of domestic violence has decreased slightly over the last 10 years nearly half of girls and women believe that a husband may be justified in beating his wife.
- To end child marriage by 2030 (to achieve the SDG target) or 2063 (to achieve the Africa Union goal), progress in Africa needs to significantly accelerate.⁷
 - Prevalence in 2030 will be 35% for the West and Central Africa Region and 27% for the East and Southern Africa Region.⁸

⁵ The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2019, *Technical Note on Gender-transformative approaches*, <https://uni.cf/3u46Fh4>

⁶ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), 2021, *Regional Report for Africa*, <https://bit.ly/3OHr9Wm>

⁷ UNICEF, 2022, *Towards ending harmful practices in Africa: A statistical overview of child marriage and female genital mutilation*, <https://bit.ly/3VxlWCJ>

⁸ UNICEF, 2022, *Child marriage in West and Central Africa: A statistical overview and reflections on ending the practice*, <https://bit.ly/3Uc6z1r>

- Annual acceleration of 26.5% and 31.4% is needed in Mozambique and Nigeria respectively to achieve target zero by 2030.
- Six of the top 10 most gender unequal societies in the world are in Africa and considered fragile.⁹ Evidence shows the impact of COVID-19, conflict and climate crisis on poverty, food insecurity and movement of people has increased the number of girls at risk of child marriage.

Risks of NOT taking a gender-transformative approach

- Continued child marriage due to lack of alternatives, which can only be created by changing the systems, services and policies to support girls' choices around marriage, family, bodily autonomy and employment.
- Child marriage is driven underground or replaced with informal unions when the legal minimum age of marriage is raised without addressing the root causes of child marriage. This approach can also delay the age of marriage but make little change to the decision-making power, status and safety of girls and adolescents.
- Those challenging the status quo are put at increased risk of backlash if the necessary enabling environment or wrap-around support are not put in place for activism and advocacy.
- Progress is fragile when gains are given as concessions in the gift of those with power, rather than following a rights-based approach.
- Responsibility for change is unjustly placed on the shoulders of girls with least power, least time and fewest resources available to bring about change.
- Existing unequal power and privilege can be reinforced if engagement with institutions and individuals in positions of power is not informed by a deep, contextual understanding of relationships of power.
- Girls' bodies and futures can be commodified – through increases in bride value – if their education is not accompanied by actions to expand their autonomy and decision-making power.

GTA in practice: An example from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda of how to shift power and resources to catalyse impact for girls

- *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships and coalitions in [Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda](#) have used an ecosystem approach to centre girls' agency and voice, and transform norms and social and economic systems to create alternatives to child marriage. They focused on:
 - Engaging boys and men, traditional and religious leaders and youth groups to transform harmful masculinities and speak out against gender discrimination and child marriage.
 - Advocacy to influence policies, budgets and institutions supported by evidence and a positive relationship with the media, leading to a second national strategy on ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Uganda.
 - Training and support for a network of youth advocates speaking out against child marriage in their communities.

⁹ Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Niger and Sierra Leone; p11 States of Fragility (2018) OECD <https://bit.ly/3OPWZiG>

Enhancing GTA practice: *Girls Not Brides* gender-transformative journey in Mozambique and Nigeria

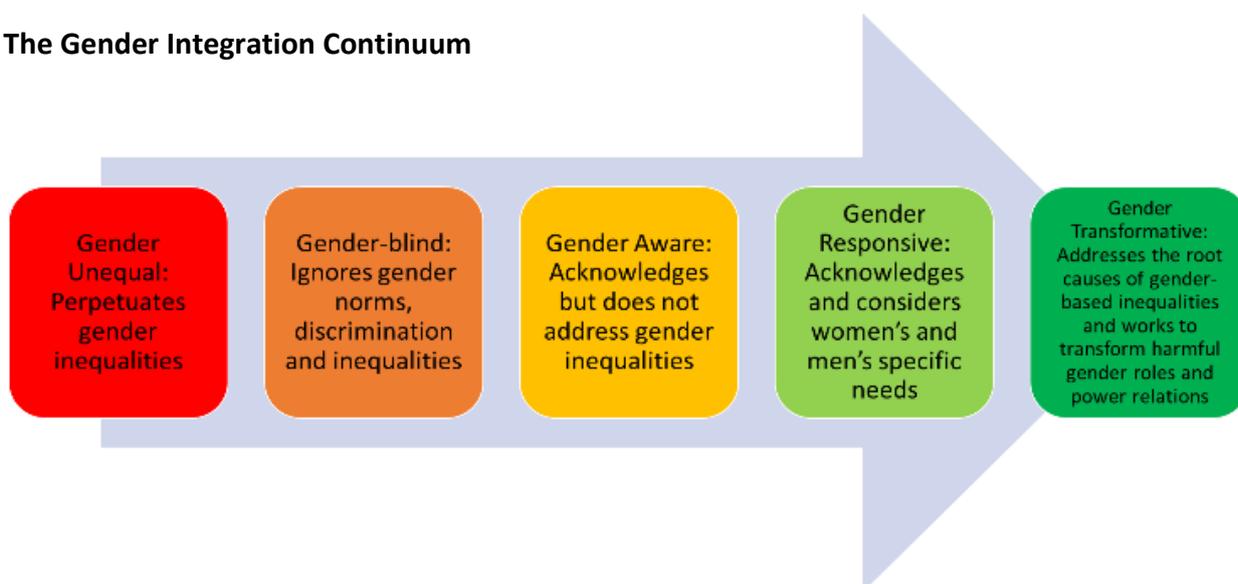
- The *Girls Not Brides* gender-transformative journey was piloted in Mozambique and Nigeria with *Coligação para Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros (CECAP)* Mozambique and the National [Coalition](#) of Civil Society Organisations to End Child Marriage in Nigeria, supported by UNICEF with funding from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative.
- *Girls Not Brides* and members adapted the UNFPA/UNICEF [GTA Accelerator Tool](#) to develop a GTA journey for civil society organisations (CSO) that supports workshop-based critical reflection and action planning to end child marriage.
- This GTA journey builds the skills, knowledge and leadership of individual practitioners and the National Partnership or coalition to analyse their position on the gender integration continuum with a view to strengthening their gender-transformative collective action.

Child marriage prevalence:

43% for Nigeria

53% for Mozambique

The Gender Integration Continuum



- The GTA journey documented in the step-by-step CSO Facilitation Guide¹⁰ builds gender-awareness and skills to critically reflect on the impact of gender norms, roles and unequal relationships of power. This supports CSO collectives to choose advocacy priorities and approaches that most effectively transform and overcome the barriers between girls, women and gender minorities and their rights, agency and autonomy, building alternatives to child marriage and the power to choose if, when and whom to marry.
- Included in the GTA journey is the *Girls Not Brides* Self-Assessment Scorecard, a tool that fosters GTA organisational “health check” as GTA action requires GTA organisational practice.

¹⁰ The CSO Facilitation Guide for a gender-transformative journey is an adaptation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage GTA Accelerator Tool. It was piloted in 2022 by *Girls Not Brides* in Mozambique and Nigeria, and will be published in 2023.

Interested in your own GTA journey? Get in touch with the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat, or reach out to one of our panellists who shared their perspectives of the experience so far.

- The gender-transformative journey has:
 - Given us the opportunity to sharpen our gender-analytical skills and perspectives about the many and inter-connected underlying causes of gender inequality and the relationship with early unions and child marriage.
 - Helped us to know ourselves better, and be clearer about our strengths and where we need to make improvements to overcome the obstacles to girls' rights and agency
 - Helped us to build a shared understanding of the dynamics and structures of power that reinforce gender inequalities, including how norms and prescribed gender roles perpetuate these inequalities and the links with bodily autonomy and gender-based violence.
 - Redoubled our commitment to centring the needs and lived experience of girls and women in all their diversity, particularly those most at risk of child marriage.
 - Encouraged us to leverage expertise within our own coalition.
 - Set us thinking about how to transform harmful masculinities and engage with traditional and religious leaders more effectively. Also, what approaches to adopt in transforming power, privilege and discriminatory norms in context-sensitive dialogue.
 - Got us thinking more about how to build the economic agency and leadership of girls, given the link between child marriage and poverty and the need for economic alternatives to child marriage.
 - Encouraged us to be more mindful of using non-sexist, inclusive and rights-based language in our advocacy, and our work with communities.
 - Re-energised us as a collective, we are sharing our learning, and communicating better and moving away from our siloed approach.

“He who wears the shoes knows where it pinches most.”

“What they [religious and traditional leaders] say and what they believe influences what the people that they lead also believe.”